

MHR *Connections*

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Diversity and courage key components to this year's human rights awards

The reception for the annual human rights awards of Manitoba was filled with talking and laughter mixed with a lot of pride and a definite sense of accomplishment. The two recipients will join the many other distinguished award winners who have promoted human rights in Manitoba.

This year the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award,

which recognizes a person or group of people under 25 years old, was awarded to Rebekah Enns, a student at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate.

Rebekah took on the topic of homosexuality even though the subject is a controversial one in her community. Rebekah initiated a Gay-Straight alliance group in her school, an act her guidance counsellor, Donna Peters-Small, called "courageous."

The Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba this year focused on recognizing employers or unions who have demonstrated a commitment to human rights resulting in an inclusive and diverse

MARL Board member Marty Dolin presents Rebekah Enns with the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award. Rebekah thanked those who supported her and said she started her Gay-Straight Alliance Group because she believes that acceptance comes from understanding.

workplace. In introducing this year's recipient, the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 832, the former Regional Director of the Canadian Human Rights Commission Nicole Ritchot said, "Unions have often been at the forefront of social justice," adding that it was rewarding to see the President of the Union, Jeff Traeger, demonstrate his leadership and commitment to human rights.

These awards are given out every year around International Human Rights Day, which is December 10. This year the recipients of the awards were honoured at a reception on December 8. Family, friends, colleagues, teachers and human rights supporters attended the reception to meet and congratulate the 2011 award recipients.

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THE MANITOBA
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DROITS DE LA PERSONNE
DU MANITOBA

Happy Holidays Everyone

The Rights Connection

by Jerry Woods, Chairperson

Two words are having an impact on the promotion of human rights, especially on bullying which often accompanies discrimination. These words are acceptance and understanding.

Rebekah Enns says that, when it comes to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, ignorance should be replaced by understanding. This, she believes, leads the way to acceptance.

The 2011 Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award recipient admits that she has never experienced bullying but is very aware of some of the tragic consequences. She is not alone in her belief that understanding leads to acceptance, especially when it comes to the many stop-bullying efforts.

Bullying is no longer accepted as part of growing up, nor is the "kids will be kids" way of thinking. Our changing attitude about bullying has resulted with it being dealt with in different ways, on different fronts. In some provinces, laws are changing to reflect the seriousness of bullying. And then there is the powerful voice of young people who are speaking out. This month in Toronto, 9,000 students chanted the pledge "I will make it better" during an anti-bullying rally. Other successful anti-bullying campaigns include Fort Worth's City Councilman Joel Burn's "it gets better" message.

Like many who are aware of the sometimes horrific consequences of bullying, Councillor Burns knows that one of the most targeted groups are those who are, or perceived to be, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered. The results have been tragic. A Canadian study at Concordia University confirmed that anti-gay bullying increases the rate at which gays, lesbians and transgender individuals take their own lives. One of the latest is 15-year-old Ottawa high-school student James Hubley. Openly gay, and tormented by depression and the action of his peers, Hubley ended his own life on Oct. 15, 2011.

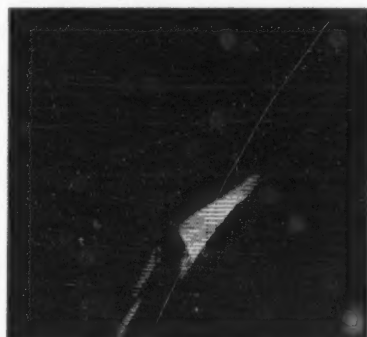
So what can we do? We can listen to those who are being bullied. We can appreciate the philosophy of Rebekah Enns and others who want to replace ignorance with understanding and acceptance. We can add our voice to those of young people and say "I will make it better." All of us must make a united effort to understand and accept, and put an end to bullying.

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In his opening, the Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission Jerry Woods said how both Rebekah Enns and the United Food and Commercial Workers Union inspire us by being role models for other individuals and organizations.

The annual event is hosted by the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. The awards acknowledge human rights work that has advanced the rights of Manitobans and are presented to those who have promoted respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission and its valued partners congratulate the 2011 Human Rights Awards recipients.



In accepting the 2011 Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba, Jeff Traeger, the President of the UFCW Local 832 said that his union "believes that every individual is entitled to certain inalienable human rights in pursuit of a more equitable, healthier, socially and economically just society."

Traditionally the Awards Ceremony begins with the lighting of a candle, and this year that honour was given to Aggie Funk-Unrau. Through the work of Amnesty International, the candle has become a world-wide symbol for human rights. It was chosen by the founder of Amnesty International, Peter Beneson, because it brought to mind the Chinese proverb "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."



Staff of the UFCW Local 832 proudly displays their Human Rights Commitment Award Certificates of Achievement. The UFCW is the only union in Canada to have produced and implemented such courses as Dignity at Work, Stop Bullying, Culture Comfort and Aboriginal Awareness.

Human Rights Agencies call on all Canadian Governments to fulfill obligations

Marking December 3rd United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies (CASHRA) has launched its new brochure, *Canada and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

The plain language brochure is about the rights of persons with disabilities as set out by the United Nations' document the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) and what Canada is expected to do.

CASHRA is calling on all governments to fulfill their obligations. Its recommendations range from establishing disability issues offices, which would have the responsibility of implementing the CRPD, to ensuring that adequate resources are



Chairperson Jerry Woods says many systemic settlements have quietly changed the lives of many people with disabilities.

in place to promote, protect and monitor priority plans.

"The CRPD strengthens legal rights for persons with disabilities and governments should use that document to develop and carry out laws and policies to better protect and advance the rights of people with disabilities," says Jerry Woods, Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, which is a member of CASHRA. "Here in Manitoba the CRPD was used as the guiding principle in the settlement between the Government of Manitoba and Community Living Manitoba," he adds.

The rights of people with disabilities have also been reinforced in other well known Manitoba Commission settlements. For example, the mediated settlement between the City of Winnipeg and two individual complainants resulted in the continual installation of audible signals at controlled intersections. Another example is the Commission-mediated settlement between the Alzheimer's Society and Handi-Transit.

"These are the high profile settlements, which received public attention. We have many other systemic discrimination settlements that have quietly changed the lives of many people with both mental and physical disabilities," Mr. Woods says.

The CRPD was developed and passed in record time by the UN with unprecedented involvement and support from persons with disabilities; their motto is "Nothing about us without us!" Canada signed the CRPD in 2007, and Parliament ratified it in March 2010.

Visit [w a copy of Canada and the UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities](http://www.a copy of Canada and the UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities) and to learn more about what human rights commissions across Canada are doing to help promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities.